

R 151213Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5307  
INFO SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS GABORONE 000909

DEPT FOR OES/STC, OES/PCI, OES/ETC, OES/FO, OES/ENV  
DEPT FOR AF/S, AF/EPF AND EEB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TPHY](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [BC](#)

SUBJECT: BOTSWANA REAFFIRMS ITS COMMITMENT TO RIVER BASIN ACCORDS

¶1. Summary: Botswana hosted September 15 a USAID-sponsored regional meeting under the aegis of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) on river basin organizations (RBOs) for relevant GOB ministries and departments, and representatives from the four RBOs of which Botswana is a member. Attendees included the Ministers of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism (MEWT); Lands and Housing (MOLH); Agriculture (MOA); and Energy, Mineral Resources and Water (MEMRW), as well as officials from other GOB agencies, RBOs and donor countries. Key goals of the workshop included: a) understand the role of RBOs and the implications for Botswana as member; b) work toward a coordinated national approach; and c) clarify the role of donors. Botswana sent a clear message of its commitment to RBOs, notwithstanding its own national challenges, such as human resources and financial constraints. End Summary.

#### Purpose of Event

¶2. The Government of Botswana (GOB) hosted September 15 at the prestigious Phakalane Golf Club in Gaborone a USAID-sponsored regional meeting under the aegis of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) on river basin organizations (RBOs) for relevant GOB ministries and departments, and representatives from the four RBO's of which Botswana is a member. Crucially, the Ministers of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism (MEWT) Kitso Mokaila, Lands and Housing (MOLH) Nonfo Molefhi, Agriculture (MOA) Christian De Graaf, and Energy, Mineral Resources and Water (MEMRW) Ponastshago Kedikilwe attended the event. Other attendees were the Deputy Attorney General T.E. Malebeswa, Permanent Secretary from Foreign Affairs, and other senior and working-level officials (Note: Foreign Minister P.T. Skelamani had committed to attend but had to instead accompany President Khama to witness the signing of the power-sharing accords in Zimbabwe. End Note). The participating RBOs were the Permanent Okavango River Basin Commission (OKACOM), the Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM), the Limpopo Commission (LIMCOM) and the Zambezi Commission (ZAMCOM).

¶3. Master of Ceremonies Oliver Chapeyama noted the objectives of the ministerial meeting/workshop were to:

a) understand the role of RBOs ; b) understand the implications of Botswana becoming a signatory to the RBO accords; c) work toward a coordinated, cross-sectoral national approach; and d) elucidate the role of the international cooperating partners (ICPs: this is SADC's term for donors). In his keynote speech, Minister Kedikilwe said the presence of the four ministers showed they understood the importance of the event. "Water is life," he intoned, "and one should share it magnanimously with those that lack it." He reaffirmed Botswana's commitment to transboundary water management, highlighting its membership in the four RBOs participating in the event. Minister Kedikilwe revealed that the workshop was the first attempt at a coordinated national approach to RBO management and thus was unique. It provided an opportunity to engage in collective dialogue on transboundary water management and an enhanced understanding of the issues involved. The Minister stressed that the RBOs still need technical and financial aid from ICPs, and thanked USAID and SADC for organizing the event.

#### The ICPs

¶4. In his brief presentation, USAID's Regional NRM Program Manager Chris Schaan began by noting that endeavoring to improve transboundary water management is no small undertaking, as evidenced

by the establishment of RBOs and or joint technical committees. He stressed that improving cooperation across borders to jointly manage water resources, the majority of which share river basins in Southern Africa, is a logical step forward, given the threats to freshwater resources in the world today. "Freshwater resources are finite and are under serious threat," he warned. These threats include over extraction, increasing human needs and development, global climate change, deforestation, and environmental pollution. Schaan said that "being part of a river basin organization can help address these threats in a collaborative way that transcends borders." RBOs could also be a platform for building trust, understanding and goodwill that can be important in mitigating tensions over freshwater resources, should they arise. He continued that given the demands that are being placed on freshwater resources, the transboundary nature of many of the major rivers in SADC, and the essential role water plays in everyday life, RBOs, with support from SADC's Water Division and donors could help ensure that water resources are managed in an equitable and environmentally sustainable manner. This, in turn, could help improve the livelihoods of people within the river basins.

15. Dr. Horst Vogel, Program Manager for the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) branch based in Gaborone, explained Germany's support for and sponsorship of RBO-related activities. He noted Germany's lead role in the water sector as agreed to by SADC, and explained the tools and methods of harmonizing transboundary water management in Southern Africa. Horst said GTZ was developing an ICP Internet platform that would engage the 15 organizations involved in the water sector, such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, USAID, GTZ and other ICPs. He warned that without financial data from the ICPs and SADC member countries, it would be very difficult to identify gaps in funding needs and availability. SADC's Water Division Senior Program Manager Phera Ramoeli then discussed SADC's Protocol on Shared Water Resources, its Regional Water Policy and Strategy, and its Regional Strategic Action Plan (RSAP). Ramoeli said key RSAP issues include capacity building, resources, water governance and infrastructure development. He stressed that SADC's preferred modus operandi is basin-wide rather than bilateral approaches, especially since its role is to coordinate, not to implement policy.

#### The Commissions

16. Representatives of the four RBO commissions in Southern Africa described the history, structure, purpose and goals of their organizations and provided an update on their activities. (Note: These commissions are: i) The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM), comprising Botswana, Angola and Namibia; ii) The Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM), comprised of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa; iii) The Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM), made up of Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa; and iv) The Zambezi Action Plan Project 6 Phase II (ZACPRO 6-2), a precursor to the imminent Zambezi Commission (ZAMCOM), comprising of Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. End Note). The Head of OKACOM's Secretariat based in Maun, Dr. Ebenezario Chonguica, praised SADC's collaboration with the USG (i.e., USAID and its implementing partner IRBM), the Swedish Government (i.e., SIDA), and UNDP/GEF's (i.e., its Global Environmental Facility) Environmental Protection and Sustainable Management of the Okavango River Basin Project (EPSMO). He said EPSMO provides collaborative opportunities in transboundary river basin management and noted its linkages with the national initiatives of the riparian states, such as Botswana's Okavango Delta Management Plan (ODMP). Chonguica also highlighted OKACOM's challenges and opportunities, institutional arrangements, and program development. The LIMCOM representative revealed that since its 2003 signing, only Zimbabwe remained to ratify the accord. He warned that there could be no progress before this happened.

#### GOB Perspective

17. Director of the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) Steve Monna explained the role of his agency in handling bilateral and multilateral environmental accords (MEAs). He said the GOB categorizes them as either part of the Rio Convention or "Non Rio". He added that MEAs recognize the economic value of natural

resources, the inter-dependence of people and ecosystems, and the need for national, regional and global action with international support for their effective management. Monna noted that key GOB challenges include raising public awareness about MEAs, building synergies with other Rio Conventions, and addressing human resources and financial constraints. Finally, he observed that Botswana's new Wetlands Policy, which awaits parliamentary approval, aims to address the raft of conflicting policies on managing the Okavango Delta. The Permanent Secretary (PS) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Samuel Outlule explained MFA's role in ensuring compliance with international accords. He said the MFA convenes relevant line ministries to find a common approach to implementing such accords. In addition, the Inter-ministerial Committee on Treaties and Accords weighs in on the issues. He reminded all agencies that bringing in the MFA early in the negotiating process would reduce delays and facilitate the signing, ratification and implementation of MEAs and other agreements.

¶8. During the discussions, Botswana's interest in, an obligations and commitment to international accords, especially transboundary RBOs, emerged as a major theme. MFA's PS intoned that Botswana needs to adhere to all signed accords to ensure accrual of benefits from them.

Minister Kedikilwe cited, as an example of Botswana's challenges, its valiant attempt to adhere to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES). He said Botswana tries to balance the protection of elephants, whose successful conservation has ironically brought destruction of crops and property of communities, with poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Minister Mokaila concurred, opining that "Botswana's 150,000 elephant population is simply not sustainable." He added that CITES sees Africa as one range, when in fact it should be divided into separate ones. The ORASECOM representative opined that Lesotho's use of its water resources (e.g., huge dams for electricity and water transfers to South Africa) is a good example of "benefit sharing" implied by transboundary agreements. In response to Minister Molefhi's query about ensuring the coordination of the four RBOs, SADC's Ramoeli said that since SADC enables these RBOs, they should share their experiences in perhaps formal annual reports or in some type of other fora. Kedikilwe promised that as good start, he planned to share the results of this ministerial workshop with Botswana's Cabinet, which, he said, reflects its importance.

Closing  
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¶10. In closing the event, MFA's PS Outlule noted that the commissioners do not only represent their respective countries, but also the relevant basins that support wildlife and provide water. He thanked and praised the four ministers for attending the event, noting that this showed their strong leadership and a true commitment to RBOs and other multilateral accords.

Gonzales